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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 002788

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PARIS/MUNICH PLEASE PASS SRAP HOLBROOKE
FROM AMBASSADOR BEYRLER FOR SRAP HOLBROOKE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF SRAP HOLBROOKE, NOVEMBER
15-17

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle; reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) Ambassador Holbrooke, your visit to Moscow provides an opportunity to gain buy-in on our Afghan strategy with a key partner with both close-in experience and wide-ranging interests in Afghanistan. The GOR is looking for genuine consultations on regional strategy and needs to be convinced the American approach has a chance of success -- otherwise, the GOR will hedge its bets and refrain from committing political or financial capital. Overall, U.S.-Russian relations have improved dramatically and the climate is the most promising I have seen in the last decade. Afghanistan featured prominently during recent visits by the President, the Secretary and General Jones -- now is the time to flesh out how our countries can cooperate. Russian proponents of greater Russian involvement believe anything is possible short of combat boots on the ground. But the GOR is not yet prepared to pony up: Russia is in austerity mode and GOR officials see the enormous Western commitment of resources as sufficient. Russia may even seek to profit from the situation by bidding on contracts for transportation services and infrastructure projects. Once Russia is with us on the strategy, we can find modest ways to augment its current contributions. Your expert-level working groups should identify exactly what Russia can bring to the table. Apart from assistance, in the medium term Russia could serve as a source of investment, business and education opportunities for northern Afghanistan. In this regard, we should seek ways to make its Afghanistan-relevant activities in Central Asia (e.g. law-enforcement and counter-narcotics work) dovetail with our own programs in Afghanistan. To the extent we can keep the momentum of the "Reset" strong, Russian support for our efforts in Afghanistan should increase. Your visit will demonstrate our willingness to listen to Russian concerns and to use the growing trust in our relations to advance common goals. End summary.

Strategic Context

2. (C) Because the bitter taste of Afghanistan still lingers 20 years after the Soviet pullout, most Russian strategists would prefer to ignore it. But as a source of narcotics and a terrorist training ground adjacent to Russia's weak Central Asian neighbors, Afghanistan threatens to breed a 21st-century domino effect that Russians fear could result in failed states on its doorstep. Growing instability in the

North Caucasus (whose Islamists are linked with extremists in Afghanistan and elsewhere) is a daily reminder to those in Moscow of what's at stake. While Russia's goals are clear -- an Afghanistan free of drugs and terrorists -- its ability to influence outcomes there is extremely limited. Russia has no stomach for projecting force into Afghanistan, its "soft power" is negligible or perhaps negative, given the painful memories in Afghanistan of the Soviet occupation.

13. (C) Without the ability to effect outcomes directly in Afghanistan, Russian policy is dominated by the tension between its interest in a stable Afghanistan (i.e. supporting Western involvement throughout the region) and its desire to establish its "zone of unique influence" in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. After 9/11, Putin welcomed the U.S. presence in the region (including in the former Soviet states) as a means to contain the dangerous instability emanating from Afghanistan. But, as the years following 2001 wore on, Russia put a higher priority on reasserting its primacy in Central Asia by pressuring for the closure of our base in Uzbekistan and encouraging the Kyrgyz to follow suit.

During the Manas dispute, we saw the pendulum swing back, with Moscow adopting a more neutral stance on our continued presence, and augmenting our cooperation on re-supply by signing the Overflight Agreement. Alarm over the drug problem was a major factor motivating this shift.

Counter-Narcotics

MOSCOW 00002788 002 OF 003

14. (C) Since Russia is both a transit country and a consumer of Afghan opiates, the GOR has a strong interest in reducing the supply of drugs heading north and counter-narcotics tops the list of areas for cooperation cited by Russian officials.

There are already some modest achievements. The NATO-Russia Council Counter-Narcotics program has trained almost 1,000 Afghan and Central Asian counternarcotics personnel (360 of these at training facility outside of Moscow). Because Afghanistan prefers in-country CN training, more funding for Mobile Training Teams is necessary. On September 28, the U.S. announced it would contribute \$100,000 to the program; we should encourage a similar pledge from Russia.

15. (C) Some multilateral assistance in CN has suffered due to bickering about European/Eurasian security architecture. Russia wants us -- and NATO -- to recognize the Russia-dominated CSTO as a coequal interlocutor on issues such as CN. While establishing CSTO-NATO relations is not an option for now, we are willing to entertain CSTO proposals for mutually beneficial projects in the region. In a similar vein, OSCE recently crafted a set of 16 projects to help build Afghanistan border/customs police capacity. Russia blocked two projects -- refurbishing a regional border training facility in northern Afghanistan and conducting mentoring and monitoring along Afghanistan's northern border.

While Russia cited financial and security concerns, its veto probably stems from a reluctance to allow more OSCE activities in the region. You should encourage Russia to lift its hold on these projects now.

Military Transit

16. (C) NATO-Russia cooperation on overland shipments of non-lethal equipment has led to the transit of over 3,158 containers of cargo since it began in March; currently 60 percent of all cargo shipped through the Northern Distribution Network transits Russia. The Overflight Agreement, signed at the July Summit, remains stalled. The inaugural flight took place last month, but the GOR (at the lower levels) is slow-rolling implementation because over-flights require funding to pay the quasi-private entity

that provides navigation services. There are also some technical issues we hope will be resolved at the expert level during your visit. Given that the air transit agreement is clearly seen here as a presidential-level initiative, we believe this agreement will ultimately be a success, but it needs additional prodding -- including during your visit.

Development Assistance

17. (C) The Soviet experience in building infrastructure in Afghanistan makes Russia seem like a natural for reconstruction work. But the GOR's new development agency (RosCooperation) is not yet capable of conducting projects in Afghanistan. GOR officials regularly encourage us to use private Russian companies, which have shown no initiative in bidding on reconstruction contracts. Underlying this inertia is a feeling among many GOR officials that Afghanistan is already receiving sufficient financial assistance and should use some of this money to fund projects and purchase equipment on its own.

18. (C) In the near term, the Russian Ministry of Civil Defense and Emergency Situations (EMERCOM) may be a more promising partner than RosCoop. This year the Ministry plans to ship 7,000 tons of wheat and provide vehicles, including 50 Kamaz trucks for the central government in Kabul and two fire-fighting vehicles to the Balkh provincial government. In March, the Ministry sent 40 metric tons of aid, including foodstuffs, clothing and tents. EMERCOM also possesses expertise in several relevant fields such as civil engineering so the ministry could conceivably transition from humanitarian donations to technical assistance or management of entire projects. In addition, RosCoop expressed interest in working with Afghan authorities in the development of Mazar University.

Military Assistance

MOSCOW 00002788 003 OF 003

19. (C) In the area of Military Assistance, the GOR will likely continue its theme that Russian-made weapons are a logical fit for Afghanistan because they are low-cost, well-suited to the harsh conditions in Afghanistan and familiar to Afghan security forces. Hindering future donations is Russia's preference for commercial contracts and its belief that previous contributions have gone unused; the Afghans and CSTC-A complained that the equipment was in poor condition. A list of requested military equipment donations, developed in consultation with the Afghans, was delivered to the GOR in October. Funding challenges at the MOD make acting on this list unlikely until at least 2010. We would like to hear Russian ideas as to how such items could be provided free or cheaply to the Afghan National Security Forces.
Beyrle